

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

September 15, 2003
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Deputy Mayor Degginger, and Councilmembers Creighton, Mosher, and Noble

ABSENT: Mayor Marshall, and Councilmembers Davidson and Lee

1. Executive Session

Deputy Mayor Degginger opened the meeting at 6:01 p.m. and announced recess to Executive Session for approximately 45 minutes to discuss one item of potential litigation and one item of labor negotiations.

The Study Session resumed at 6:50 p.m. with Deputy Mayor Degginger presiding.

2. Study Session

(a) Status Report on Access Downtown Project

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman welcomed Agnes Govern, Sound Transit, and David Dye, Washington State Department of Transportation to provide an update on the Access Downtown project. The project is a large package of transportation improvements along I-405 including interchange improvements at SE 8th Street, NE 8th Street, NE 4th Street, and NE 6th Street (which includes the addition of direct transit access ramps). Related improvements to city streets have been completed on time and within budget.

Mr. Dye recalled that the SE 8th Street contract was completed ahead of schedule and under budget in May. He commended Bellevue staff for their management and coordination of the project. The NE 4th Street and NE 6th Street interchanges represent the largest component of the project. Demolition of the NE 4th Street interchange began in June, and NE 4th Street will reopen in December. Ramps for this interchange will open in mid-2004. Work on the NE 6th Street interchange will begin once those ramps are in place, with completion scheduled for early 2005.

Mr. Dye explained that half of the NE 8th Street structure will be moved into place during September 19th through 21st. Completion of this major endeavor will allow the construction of

roadway approaches so that traffic on Monday will be able to use the eastbound lane of the bridge. Mr. Dye said I-405 through Bellevue will be closed between 10:00 p.m. on Friday, September 19 and 10:00 a.m. the next morning. Additional partial lane closures will occur over the weekend.

Ms. Govern expressed appreciation for the excellent Bellevue and WSDOT staff assigned to this project. Sound Transit's 2004 proposed budget recommends a \$25 million reduction in the project budget due to cost savings and efficiencies achieved so far. The funds will be reprogrammed for additional transit projects. Ms. Govern explained that the NE 6th Street direct access ramps will connect I-405 transit/HOV lanes directly to Bellevue Transit Center, improving speed and reliability for transit riders and carpoolers. General purpose lane benefits include improved safety and the future potential for adding a lane in each direction on I-405.

Councilmember Mosher praised the overall coordination of the project including efforts to minimize traffic disruptions, reduce costs, and move the project forward ahead of schedule.

Deputy Mayor Degginger questioned plans for the \$25 million reduction in the project budget. Ms. Govern recalled that Sound Transit originally increased its contribution to the Access Downtown project by \$18 million from unanticipated East King County revenues. Sound Transit's current budget proposal would return \$18 million to unanticipated East King County revenues for reprogramming. The remaining \$7 million would be transferred to the Regional Express capital program reserve, which was established to support unanticipated costs for future projects in East King County.

City Manager Steve Sarkozy commended the strong Access Downtown project team. He noted the Bellevue Downtown Association honored this project as *Miracle of the Year* for its success in minimizing traffic impacts throughout construction.

(b) Cable Television Franchise Renewal Update

Transportation Assistant Director Nora Johnson explained that today's presentation follows up on the February briefing to Council regarding renewal of the cable television franchise agreement with Comcast Communications.

Franchise Manager David Kerr said the current franchise will expire in July 2004. Comcast serves approximately 30,000 subscribers in Bellevue. The local cable system upgrade has been completed and broadband service is now available for residents. Mr. Kerr said a major focus of the current negotiations is customer service issues including availability and accessibility, company responsiveness, reception and outages, billing, treatment of private property, services for customers with disabilities, protection of customer information, safety, complaint procedures, and protection of privacy.

Mr. Kerr recalled that Council asked staff to conduct a financial review of Comcast's profitability within Bellevue. Staff requested financial information from Comcast in March 2003, and an incomplete response was received in August. Additional information has been

requested and Comcast has agreed to provide historical data only. Comcast is not willing to provide financial information related to future business projections.

Mr. Kerr explained that a list of needs was created early in the negotiation process and the following issues have been resolved: regional interconnections, free service to local schools, full-service cable office on the Eastside, customer service standards, and cable system upgrades. Two additional areas to be addressed are enhanced I-Net connectivity (to schools and government sites) and replacement equipment for BTV and Bellevue Community College. The current franchise agreement permits the City to collect up to \$1 per I-Net subscriber per month. Although the City does not currently collect this money, it would like to preserve the option to collect in the franchise renewal agreement.

Turning to the replacement of BTV equipment, Mr. Kerr said a capital investment will be required to continue the interlocal relationship between the City and Bellevue Community College. The current franchise permits the City to collect up to \$1 per subscriber per month for public, educational, and government needs. Although the City does not currently collect this fee, this is a typical funding mechanism to provide capital for needed projects.

Mr. Kerr reviewed the following next steps:

- January 2004 – Next Council briefing on franchise renewal. Conduct small follow-up survey of citizens to update community needs and interests.
- March 2004 – Present proposed franchise agreement to Council.
- June 2004 - Present final franchise agreement to Council.
- July 2004 – Council action on final franchise agreement.

Councilmember Mosher is pleased with the cable and broadband upgrades for residents.

Responding to Mr. Creighton, Mr. Kerr said the City cannot regulate cable rates, which are based on formulas developed by the FCC. Mr. Creighton is frustrated that rates have increased beyond inflationary increases in recent years. He noted survey results indicating only moderate community support for the potential of implementing the monthly \$1 subscriber fee to pay for government needs.

Mr. Noble questioned the City's interest in obtaining Comcast's financial information pertaining to future business projections. Mr. Kerr said the cable act specifies that a city may require a cable operator to provide for community needs and interests, taking into account the cost to provide the desired services. He explained that it is difficult to judge the effect of providing certain services if the City does not have this financial information.

3. Council Business [Regular Session Agenda Item 6]

Mr. Mosher thanked everyone who supported the Bellevue Sister Cities Association auction, which will help fund the student exchange program. He will travel to Washington, D.C., on September 16 to meet with the National Academy of Sciences' Transportation Research Board about pipeline safety and to meet with congressional representatives about Kamber Road.

Mr. Noble attended the Eastside Transportation Partnership (ETP) meeting.

Deputy Mayor Degginger attended a Bellevue 50Fest event at Crossroads and participated in the dedication of a bench in memory of Betty Gilkenson, a longtime Planning Commissioner. He noted that 71 neighborhood 50Fest events have been held so far this year. Mr. Degginger attended a statewide mental health conference held in Bellevue.

Mr. Degginger recalled the City's efforts during the past two years to improve and streamline development services. He shared portions of an email from the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties commending the City for its accomplishments including significant reductions in permit processing times. Mr. Degginger congratulated staff on this progress.

At 7:50 p.m., Deputy Mayor Degginger declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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